

Chapter 2

Demand for Outdoor Recreation

Public participation is a critical and necessary component in creating a planning document. The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation conducted a public input survey to evaluate demand for, participation in, and perceptions of outdoor recreation. The survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey and was distributed via multiple channels. In total, the study yielded over 17,000 responses.

Questions from the survey broadly address areas such as outdoor recreation participation, satisfaction with statewide outdoor recreation opportunities, motivation for participation, barriers to participation, and attitudes about the recreation provider's priorities.



Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities

In order to understand trends and popularity among outdoor recreation activities, respondents were asked to identify the activities they or household members participate in or have participated in over the past five years. The most popular activity was visiting a beach or lake, with 69 percent participating. Walking for pleasure or exercise, and visiting parks or historic sites are activities for 61 and 60 percent of respondents respectively. Over half of all respondents participate in hiking on trails (59 percent) and freshwater fishing (58 percent) (Figure 2.1). Other activities that have at least half of respondents participating are viewing scenery, fishing from a boat, nature viewing and swimming. For the participation rates for all 80 activities included on the public survey, refer to the tables in Appendix C.

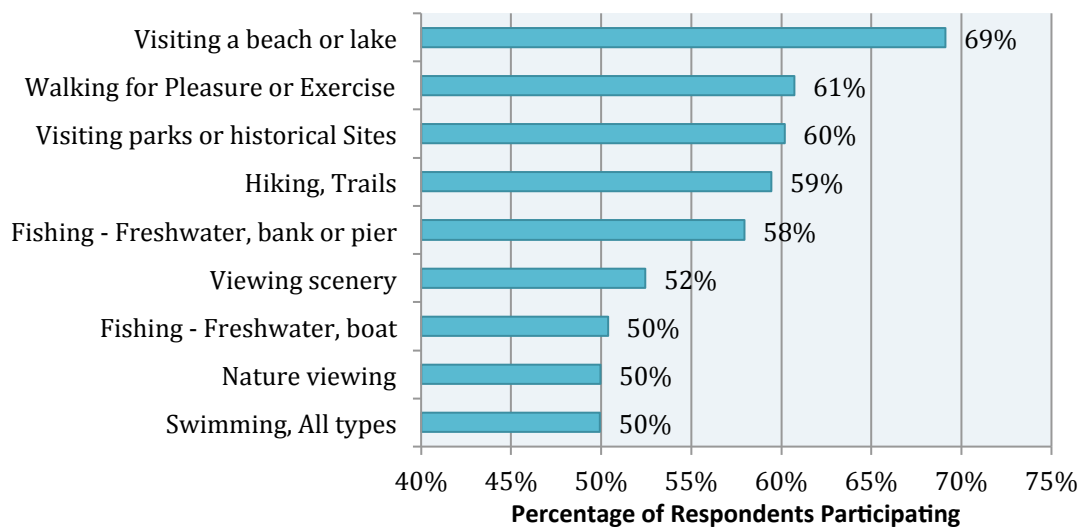


Figure 2.1 Most popular outdoor recreation activities

Why North Carolinians Recreate

Respondents were asked to describe their motivations for participating in outdoor recreation activities. The most popular answers were, being outdoors (93 %), followed by having fun (87 %) and relaxing (78 %). (Figure 2.2) Respondents also wanted to be closer to nature and spend time with family and friends.



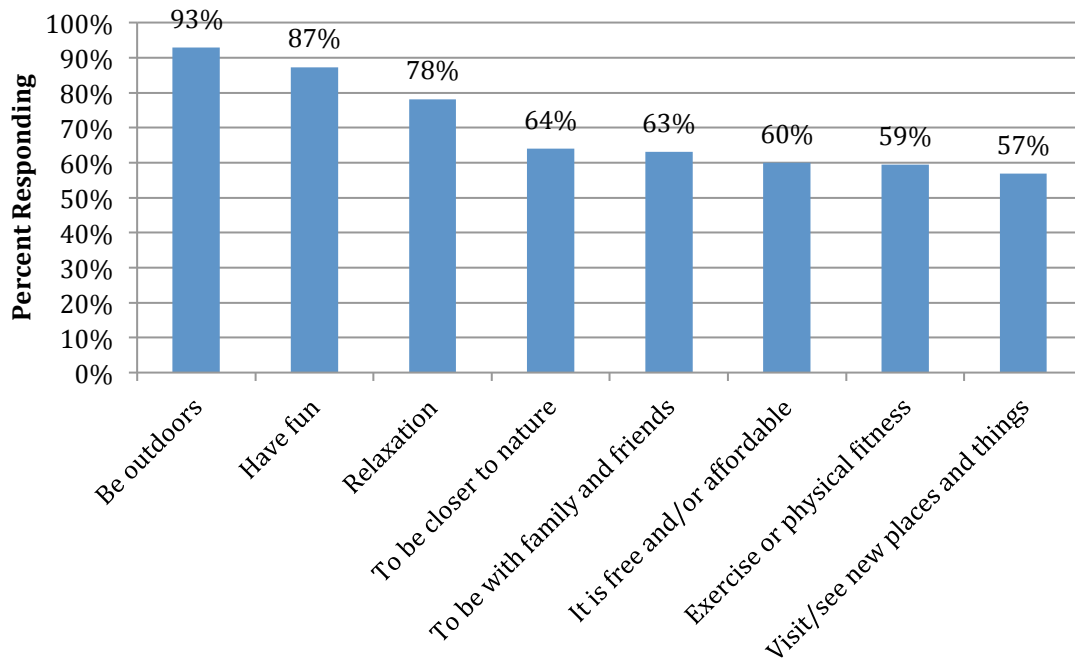


Figure 2.2 Why North Carolinians Recreate Outdoors

Satisfaction with Park Management

North Carolina residents are generally satisfied with the parks available to them. That's important because over 90 percent of those surveyed responded that local and state parks are extremely important to them. The highest levels of satisfaction are with efforts to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education. About 80 percent of respondents were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with these efforts. In contrast, about 70 percent of respondents are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with efforts to acquire and manage public land. (Figure 2.3)



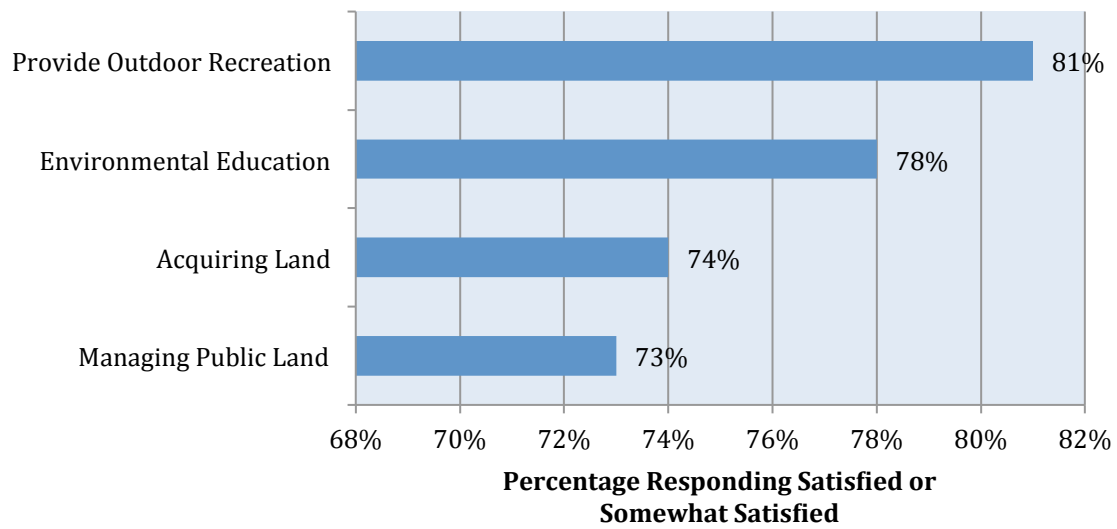


Figure 2.3 Satisfaction with park management

Priorities for Park Management

What are public priorities for parks in North Carolina? Survey respondents were asked to identify their priorities for several management objectives. The most popular top priority was “operate existing parks” (31 percent of respondents), followed closely by “acquire new parks and open space” (24 percent). Other priorities are to develop new trails, the top priority of 13 percent of respondents and to develop new facilities at existing parks (11 percent). (Figure 2.4)

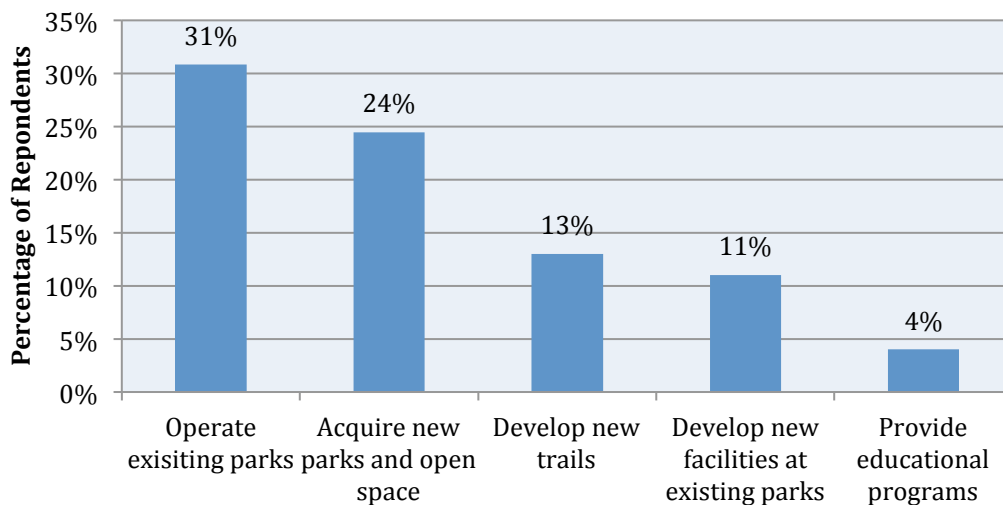


Figure 2.4. Public Priorities for park management

Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation

Alongside motivation and satisfaction, it is equally important to understand the barriers to outdoor recreation participation. Not surprisingly, a lack of time was the predominant barrier (59 percent). Nearly one quarter of respondents indicated that a lack of available facilities (23 percent) and cost (21 percent) are barriers to participation. (Figure 2.5)

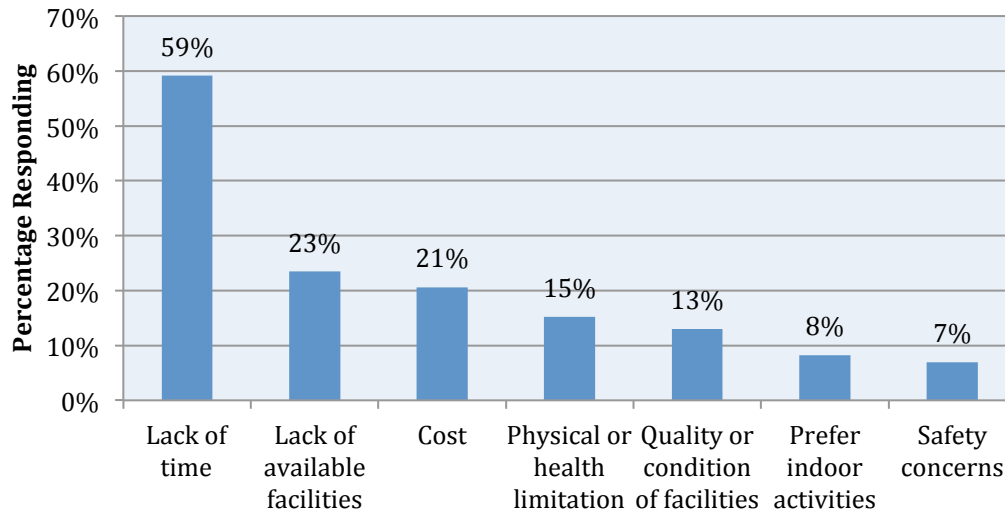


Figure 2.5. Barriers to participation in outdoor recreation

Frequency of Visits – Local, State and National Parks

Over one third (35 percent) of respondents reported having visited a local park more than eight times over the past twelve months, with 20 percent having visited at least three times. Somewhat lower percentages of respondents (22 percent and 14 percent respectively) visited state and national parks more than 8 times in the past twelve months. Roughly half of respondents visited local, state and national parks with the same frequency in the past twelve months (47, 50, and 47 percent respectively).

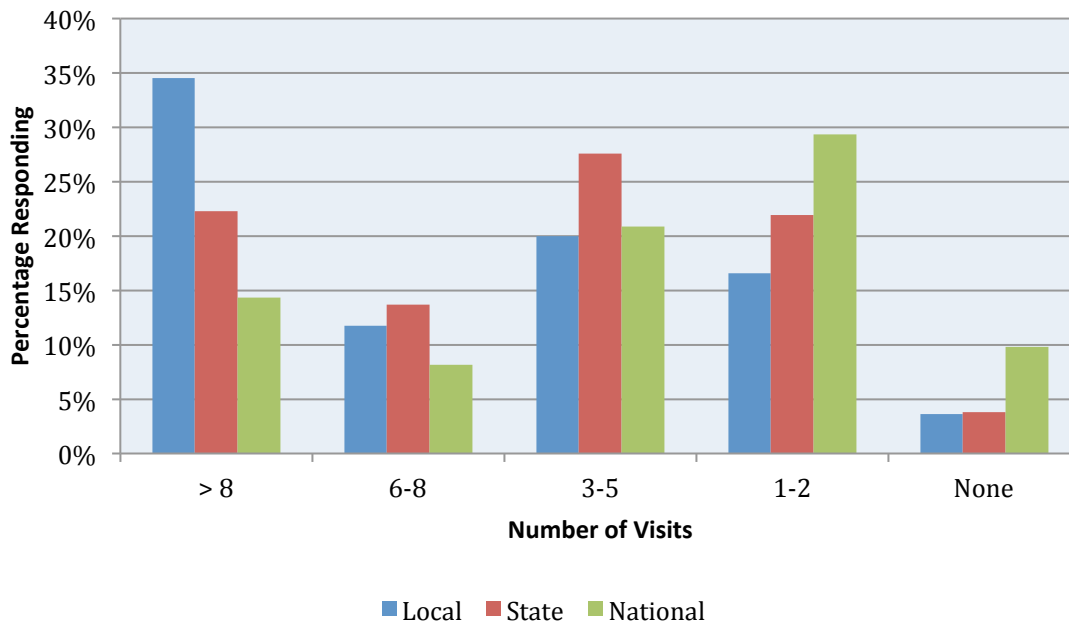


Figure 2.6. Frequency of Visits to Local, State and Federal Parks

Public Funding for Park Land and Facilities

Consistent and adequate financial resources are required to address local, state, and federal outdoor recreation needs. Among these needs are acquisition of new parks and open space, development of new facilities at existing recreation sites, operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure and facilities, transforming existing facilities to serve new purposes, and future planning. Securing appropriate ways of funding outdoor recreation resources, as cost and demand increase, remains a challenge.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, survey respondents participate in outdoor recreation in state parks frequently. It stands to reason that a large majority of respondents (81 percent) think it is extremely or somewhat important to spend public funds to acquire land and develop outdoor state parks and recreation areas in North Carolina. In addition, a majority of respondents think it is extremely or somewhat important to spend public funds to acquire land and develop outdoor recreation areas on both the local (78 percent), and federal (77 percent) levels.

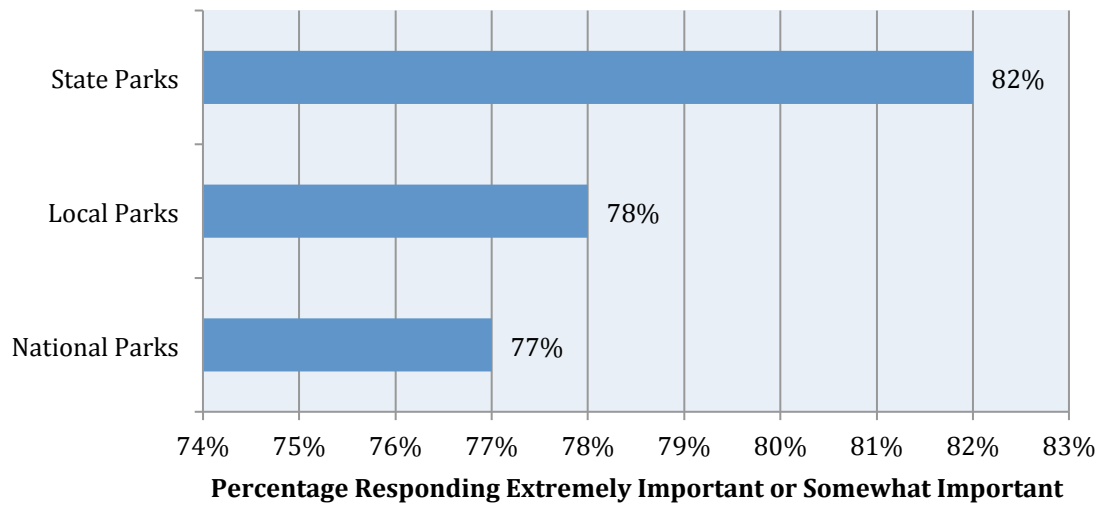


Figure 2.7. Importance of Public Funding for Park Land and Recreation Facilities



Survey of Recreation Managers

Recreation providers from across North Carolina completed an online survey designed to better understand the opportunities and challenges faced by recreation managers. Included in the study were recreation providers representing all government sectors; federal, state and local. Quasi-public/ non-profit recreation providers were also included as they have similar mandates to serve the public at-large.



Management Challenge: Obtaining Funding

Public recreation managers were asked to respond to four questions about the relative difficulty they perceive in accomplishing objectives related to providing park and recreation services to the public. The first question dealt with the challenge of obtaining funding for park facilities, land acquisition, programming and maintenance, etc. The providers rated obtaining funding for new facilities (81%), major renovations (78%), facility replacement (74%) and land acquisition (71%) more difficult. The values are the combination of managers responding either difficult or somewhat difficult. (Figure 2.8).

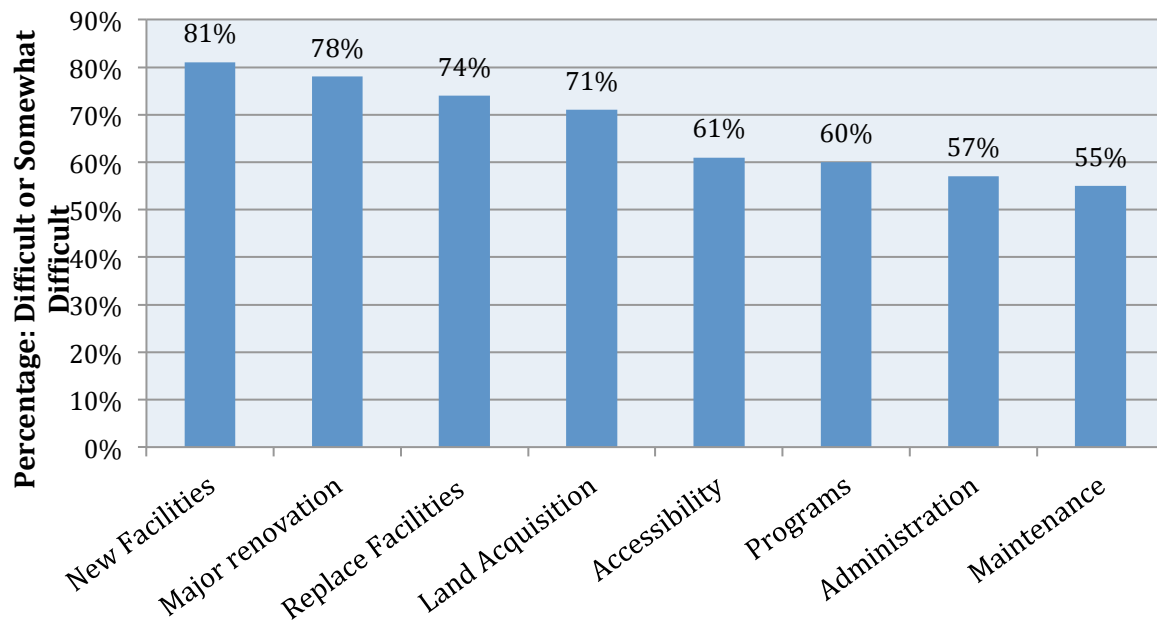


Figure 2.8. Management Challenge: Difficulty Obtaining Funding

Management Challenge: Meeting Public Needs

Public managers were asked to rate the difficulty of meeting public needs for a variety of purposes. The top responses, as measured by the managers rating the items as either difficult or somewhat difficult are: the needs of a growing population (72%), youth programming and facilities (65%), accessibility for people with disabilities (61%) and the need to acquire undeveloped park land (57%). (Figure 2.9)



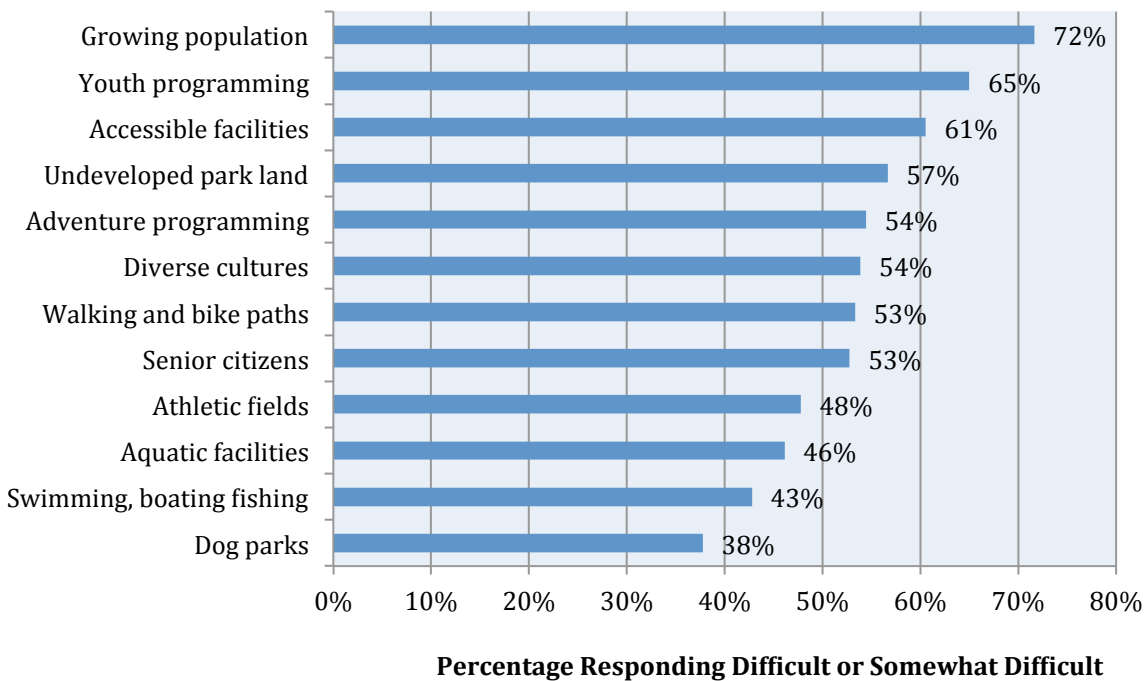


Figure 2.9. Meeting Public Needs

Management Challenge: Acquiring Land for the Future

Public managers were asked to rate the difficulty of acquiring land for a variety of purposes. The top responses, as measured by the managers rating the items as either difficult or somewhat difficult are: land for future recreation facilities (58%), for protecting significant natural resources (58%), to provide open space (56%) and the need to protect cultural resources (53%). (Figure 2.10)

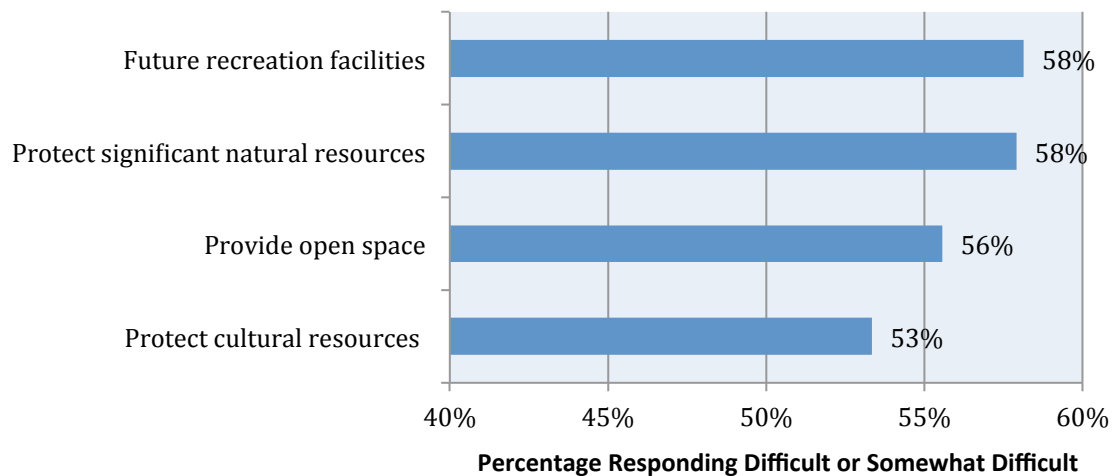


Figure 2.10. Management Challenge: Acquiring Land for the Future

Priorities: Types of Areas Currently Needed

Public recreation providers were asked to identify which types of areas are currently needed in their park system. For each type of area, the respondents had four choices: important, somewhat important, not important and not applicable. Two types of areas received the highest rating; linear parks, such as greenways and parks along rivers or streams, and nature / conservation parks. In each case, 67 percent of respondents chose either “important or “somewhat important”. Other types of area seen as either important or somewhat important by at half of the public recreation providers are trail linkages to other jurisdictions (57 percent), cultural / historic parks (57 percent), community parks (55 percent), and specialty parks such as water parks, skate parks and dog parks (54 percent). (Figure 2.11)

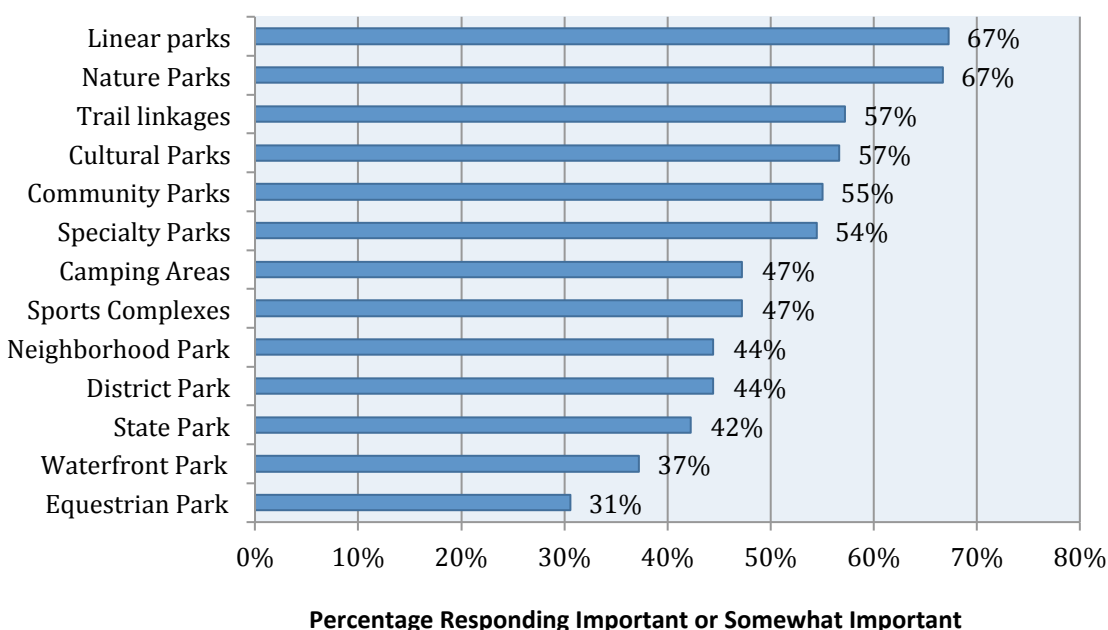


Figure 2.11. Priorities: Types of Areas Currently Needed

Priorities: Types of Facilities Currently Needed

Public recreation providers were asked to identify which types of facilities are urgently needed in their park system. For each type of facility, the respondents had four choices: urgent, somewhat urgent, not urgent and not applicable. Types of facilities seen as either urgent or somewhat urgent by at least half of the public recreation providers are unpaved trail (62 percent), picnic shelters (59 percent), wildlife / nature observation sites (54 percent), and paved trails (53 percent). (Figure 2.12) For a complete listing of facilities covered by the survey, refer to Appendix D.

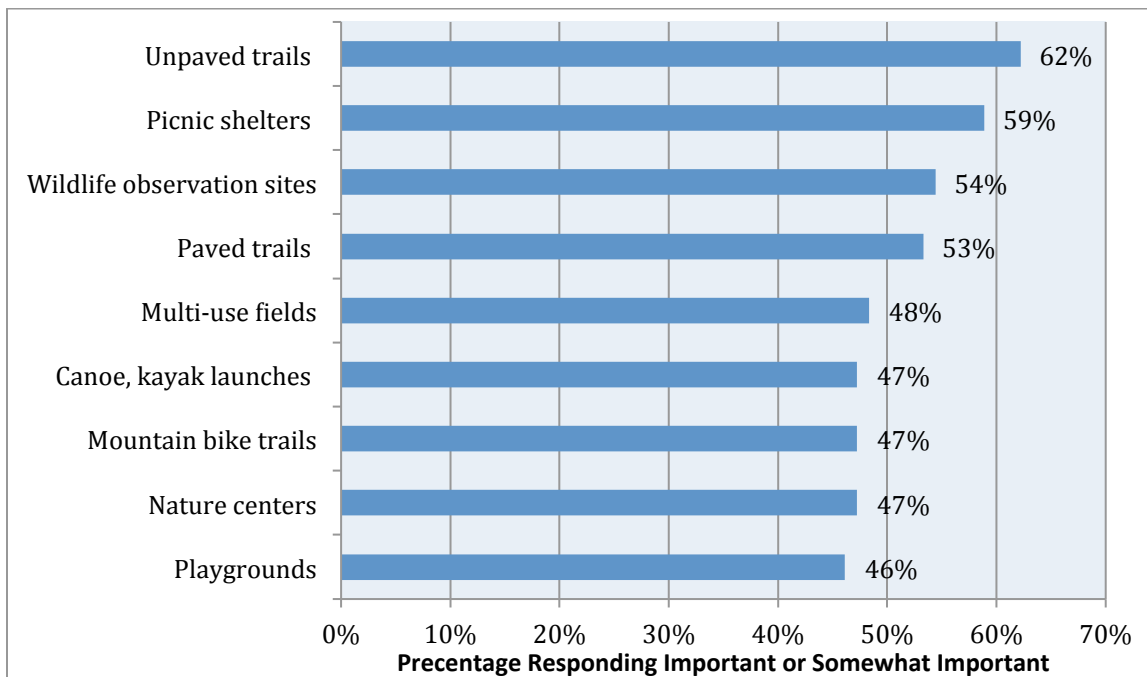


Figure 2.12. Priorities: Types of Facilities Currently Needed

